

Martin White. 9th March 2008.

The effect of the Cross.

In a few weeks it will be Easter, so for a while we will be leaving the passage we have been looking at in Ephesians 3 and will be looking instead at the Cross and Resurrection.

Many of us will have heard a lot of preaches about what happened when Jesus died and rose again in terms of Jesus' substitutionary death.

Yesterday, lots of football and rugby matches were played; in them, at certain points, one player would be taken off the field and someone else - a substitute, would come on to fill their position.

I read a book once about a man called Charles Colson who was American President Richard Nixon's right hand man. He was arrested after being involved in the Watergate scandal and was sentenced to a time in prison. During his trial he became a Christian.

At first, he just about coped with being inside, but as the weeks and months went by, he was coping less and less well; there was pressure on his family that was just about causing his marriage to break up. Just at the point where he was about to crack up, and still had another year to serve in prison, he got called into the governor's office, got handed his bag of possessions and was released.

He later found out that what had happened was that one of his new Christian friends - I think a lawyer, had found some ancient law that said that although a full prison sentence had to be served, if someone offered themselves as a substitute, they could take the guilty man's place and serve the remainder of his sentence instead... and that is what he did.

This is a small picture of what Jesus did for us in dying in our place on the Cross

Isaiah 53 says:

"Surely he took up our infirmities

and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:4-6

In other words,

- Jesus took our punishment by being punished
- He took our sorrows by becoming the "Man of sorrows"
- Jesus took our sin by becoming sin

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." Romans 8:1-3

- And, what I want to focus on today, He took our shame by enduring the shame of the Cross.

CJ Mahaney - "300 pounds of luggage with me" - cartoon
Condemnation/regret/guilt.

All of us at times carry round the shame of things we have said or not said; done or not done. And often these things can be hidden weights that nobody else knows about.

Old man (1991) - killed a young German Paratrooper on Crete during the Second World War - felt guilty "every day of his life - haunted by the image, alcoholic.

The way I treated different people (Auntie at second wedding - me as a young, zealous, judgmental Christian)

My car crash

I have spoken to people who have had secret abortions in the past

What goes on when the front door closes and arguments begin

People 'going under' financially who are too ashamed to admit that there are problems because of the shame it would bring

People failing in their marriage,
People failing in their job

Phil Yancey quote - prostitute → "Why would I go to church? I already feel bad enough about myself; they would just make me feel worse!"

In *Genesis*, there is the tragic story of Adam and Eve's sin:

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." *Genesis 3:6-10*

The effect of Adam and Eve's sin was that they felt guilt and shame, and the reaction because of that was to hide from God and to cover themselves from each other.

Shame separates and isolates us; our natural reaction is to hide from God and to distance and separate ourselves from other people.

But this is not how it needs to be because, as well as paying the price for our sin, He also endured the shame of the Cross to carry our shame.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2

The Cross was shameful for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it was an obscenely horrible and shameful way to die. In the brutal Roman Empire, which was built on military rule and conquest, which held vast, creative gladiator Games, which was so used to the site of blood; crucifixion was so brutal, it was not talked about in polite company.

The condemned man would be whipped, stripped naked and hoisted up onto a cross, next to a public road, where people could watch his slow, horrible death - often over a number of days.

All the condemned man's dignity was almost ritually taken away - through the flogging and stripping and crucifying and displaying of the body.

And this is how Jesus died - deserted by His friends, alone, mocked, spat at, beaten, stripped and crucified.

And many people at the time just couldn't get their heads round how the Cross could have been any sort of victory or triumph.

How could anyone worthy or good be tainted by this sort of death?

Paul says

"...but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" 1 Corinthians 1:22

The Cross wasn't a victory - it was foolishness - it was the most dehumanizing, humbling death - it was a death covered in shame.

And more than that, it was a punishment that was understood by the Jews to carry the punishment and curse of God.

One of the Laws in Deuteronomy says:

"If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him

that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."

Deuteronomy 21:22-23

The Jews saw this as a stumbling block - they couldn't get past it, because anyone hanging on a tree (a Law written before crucifixion was invented) had the shame of being under God's curse.

In fact, Jesus' death was utterly shameful - unless you understand that it was the voluntary act of Jesus - the Substitute for us.

Paul says in Galatians:

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

Galatians 3:13-14

The truth is that Jesus' death - although it appeared to be the most shameful end to a life, actually was the most glorious, because the shame that people saw and turned away from in disgust was not His own; it was ours.

It was the shame that we deserve to feel for our sins and failures - for our hateful words and mistakes and immorality and abortions and violence and dishonesty and self-harm and lust.

And because of God's wonderful grace, Jesus was able to endure it all and "scorn the shame of the cross"

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame" Hebrews 12:2

The Amplified Bible says "despising and ignoring the shame"

The New Living Translation says He "disregarded" the shame.

It wasn't Jesus who ended up disregarded and scorned because of the shame; it was the shame - our shame, that was totally disregarded, despised, defeated, vanquished, overcome, scorned by Jesus!

So now, just as we would say to a Christian struggling with guilt - "Don't; you're free" we can say to a Christian brother or sister who is carrying packages of

shame around with them, separated from God, hidden from each other; "You don't need to carry it any more - Jesus has carried it - so let go and give it to Him. His victory is complete. Part of the joy that was set before Him was to see you free!"

And He has put us in His Family - the Church.

C J Mahaney again says:

Don't buy the lie that wallowing in your shame is somehow pleasing to God, or that a constant, low-grade guilt will somehow lead to holiness and spiritual maturity. It's just the opposite! God is glorified when we believe with all our hearts that those who trust in Christ can never be condemned. (C J Mahaney)

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Let's fix our eyes on Him again as we close; let's allow Him to strip away our shame & guilt and restore us and call us out of the "bushes" we've been hiding in to walk with Him again.